

**WEST DESERT
(WDARM)
LOCAL WORKING
GROUP**

Date: February 10, 2020

Place: Tooele County Health Building

Individuals Present: Heather Talley (UDWR), Boyd White (NRCS/DWR), Melissa Chelak (USU), Emily Jensco (SLFO BLM), Jerry Bullock (SLFO BLM), Dylan Tucker (SLFO BLM), Jared Reese (BLM state office), Steven Peterson (BYU), Mellissa Wood (BLM), Alan Clark (interested public), April Harding (USU student), Jimi Gragg (UDWR), Terri Pope (UDWR), Joe Moore (USFWS), Stephanie Graham (SLFO BLM), Keeli Marvel (Dugway P.G.), Morgan Jaterka (USU student), Nancy Williams (SLFO BLM), Mikiah Carver (BYU), Tami Howell (BLM), Brad Jessop (BLM), Karen Hartman (USFS), Loralie Cox (UDAF), Darrell Johnson (Shambip Conservation District), Janet Larson (Shambip CD), Cjay Butters (USDA Wildlife Services), Ethan Hallows (SITLA), Reneé Chi (BLM), Lorien Belton (USU Extension)

Information Presented/Discussion Highlights

Feral Horse Research Proposal

BYU researcher Steve Peterson and his graduate student Mikiah Carver spoke about a research proposal to study the relationship between sage-grouse and feral horses. Steve provided an intro to the research, which has been funded by the BLM, but is still in the research design phase. The general concept is to study grouse and response to the presence of feral horses, in the local area.

Comments and questions included the following:

- There is a lot of sage-grouse research already out here; focusing on the horses would fill a knowledge gap.
- A paired design may be difficult because true horse absence sites may be hard to find
- There are many factors that influence grouse vital rates, so teasing out the horse influence specifically will take careful analysis and possibly many other data sets
- Physical disturbance may not correlate to flushing of sage-grouse
- Table 2.2 in the BLM's plan will be useful for thinking about habitat characteristics that grouse need, and how horses might influence that
- There is publicly available AIM data from BLM that could be used
- How would sites be stratified? By vegetation? Horse presence?
- Are drones or cameras a possibility?
- A focus on late brood-rearing wet sites would be interesting

Mikiah will send out regular updates; Lorien will provide her with the sign-in list, where people marked if they would like to be included in those updates.

NRCS updates

- Matt Phillippi is now the state biologist, and is no longer based in Tooele. Clayson Cook also moved, so the Tooele office is somewhat understaffed at the moment. The range conservationist job has been posted and will be open until April 6.
- The new farm bill allows EQIP funding for irrigation companies.

BLM updates

Mellissa Wood noted that BLM is putting together a supplemental EIS (SEIS) to address rationale for the 2019 plan amendment topics that were called out in the October court injunction. The draft SEIS will be out for comment in February. This addresses topics like cumulative impacts, alternatives, compensatory mitigation, and GHMAs. There will likely not be any public meetings to present it, but the comments will be taken on line as usual.

Jared Reese gave a brief summary of the Habitat Assessment Framework that BLM does for sage-grouse areas. He noted that both the 2015 and 2019 plans require BLM to do HAF assessments to feed into land health assessments, at multiple scales. They are working on gathering that data and writing up summary reports that can serve as reference for decisions in the future. Renee noted that the regional “Lesser Sheeprocks HAF” is in the pipeline to be done, in part spurred by the permit renewals in Government Creek. Jared or Renee can update us about it in the future.

Renee is working on the causal factors analysis, which would be a good topic for a future meeting.

Raven Discussion

A number of members of the group have indicated interest in having more robust discussions about raven predation concerns. There are several larger-scale conservations also happening:

- USFWS has some upcoming webinars (late Feb and early March) to discuss a new initiative to understand the problem. Lorien will send out the information on how to sign up.
- USU’s Berryman Institute is hosting a bird damage management conference in Salt Lake this week (Feb 11-13). Ravens are a major topic and one-day registration is available.

The original plan for discussing ravens at this meet was somewhat complicated by the aforementioned conference being scheduled and taking precedence for some people we might have invited. However, we will plan to have a larger discussion at a future WDARM meeting.

Several people shared information about local raven situations:

- Boyd has observed ravens staying at the hot springs in Rush Valley; he counted about 200 birds going down Highway 73.
- Local landowners have observed upwards of 1500 ravens gathering in Rush Valley.
- Melissa Chelak noted that there were fewer ravens last year in McIntyre; numbers appear to be up this year.

- Cjay noted that Wildlife Services has a statewide cap of 2200 ravens that can be removed by poisoned eggs; and 150 by firearms. Those caps have been maxed out. They are looking at ways to increase the limit.

The group asked what data is available on take and man hours; no one could speak directly to it. Melissa Chelak is gathering predator occupancy data for the Sheeprocks as part of her research.

Red foxes are also a predator of concern locally for sage-grouse. Cjay said he is trapping for them.

Ibapah

It was noted that we have not been out to Ibapah in a long time, and have less information about what is happening out there. Lorien will work with the Shambip CD on rescheduling the field trip that was originally planned for fall but had to be cancelled for logistical reasons.

Other updates and discussions

- The hydrology study is continuing; one of the planning tree cuttings will happen this fall (2020).
- NRCS and SITLA are focused on project planning and implementation. Boyd noted that Benmore pasture shrub plantings and BDAs are in the works.
- The CD is putting in a fire suppression tank.
- USFS has a new Range Conservationist: Linda Appel
- Lek counts will start in March
- BLM projects are getting completed: Erickson Pass was finished a year ago, Grasshopper in the Onaquis is finished, and Railroad Springs in the Tintics was just done last week.

Follow-up Needed

- Lorien will send out the information on how to sign up for the raven webinar.
- Lorien will focus a future meeting agenda on more predator discussions.
- Lorien will work with the Shambip CD on rescheduling the field trip to Ibapah
- Lorien will make sure Linda Appel is added to the listserv.

Next Meeting

The next meeting date was not decided; Lorien will send out a doodle. Topics to include:

- BLM Causal factor analysis (Renee)
- Less Sheeprocks HAF process (Jared)
- BYU horse study updates